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# Latin American Death Squads

## Underwritten by CIA, AID

"Once a trainee becomes proficient in bombing techniques, there is no stopping him from using them offensively."

by Mike Klare and Nancy Stein

A year ago, the film *State of Siege* leveled a series of startling charges at the American government.

At one point in the film, a Uruguayan Police officer was shown receiving training in the manufacture and use of explosive devices at a secret police bomb school in the southwestern United States. Later the same officer was linked to a right-wing Uruguayan "Death Squad" implicated in the murders (some performed with explosives) of prominent Uruguayan radicals.

For most American viewers and movie critics, these scenes appeared as mere cinematic flourishes in a controversial film. Now State Department documents unearthed by Senator James Abourezk (D-SD) show the film was unerringly accurate in its picture of US "counterinsurgency" programs in Latin America.

The existence of the Abourezk papers was first disclosed in Jack Anderson's syndicated column October 1973. Documents reveal the US government is, in fact, training foreign policemen in bomb-making at a remote desert camp in Texas. In response to Sen. Abourezk's inquiries, the Agency for International Development (AID) has now acknowledged that its Office of Public Safety (OPS) is providing such instruction.

At the US Border Patrol Academy in Los Fresnos, Texas, foreign policemen are taught the design, manufacture, and potential uses of homemade bombs and incendiary devices by CIA instructors. At least 165 policemen—mostly from the third world countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa—have taken this "Technical Investigations Course" since it was first offered in 1969. Sixteen more Uruguayans have received such training.

Students in the Technical Investigations Course first attend a four-week preliminary session at the International Police Academy (IPA) in Washington DC. There they are treated to lectures on such subjects as: basic Electricity ("Problems involving electricity as applied to explosives"); Introduction to Bombs and Explosives; Incendiaries; and Assassination Weapons. All costs of the training, rated at \$1750 per student, are borne by AID.

After completion of the preliminary course the trainees are flown to the Los Fresnos camp for four-week "field" sessions. All lectures at Los Fresnos are delivered at an outdoor laboratory presided over by CIA instructors. The action

lectures deal with such topics as Characteristics of Explosives; Electric Priming; Electric Firing Devices; Fabrication and Functioning Devices, and Incendiaries. According to AID these sessions include "practical exercises" with "different types of explosive devices and 'booby traps'."

In a memorandum to Sen Abourezk, AID official Matthew Harvey argued the Technical Investigations Course was set up to help foreign policemen develop "countermeasures" against terrorist attacks against banks, corporations and embassies.

In order to develop countermeasures, he claimed, the trainee must first study "home laboratory techniques" used in "the manufacture of explosives and incendiaries." Only then, according to the AID argument, will he be able "to take preventative action to protect lives and property. Although Harvey stressed the defensive nature of the training program he admitted the Department of Defense found the subject matter so inherently sensitive that it refused to provide instructors for the course.

AID was thus forced to seek help from the CIA. Indeed, once a trainee becomes proficient in bomb techniques there is no stopping him from using them offensively against criminal enterprises or, as in *State of Siege*, against opponents of a ruling oligarchy.

Such a possibility becomes more real when one examines a list of countries represented at the Texas bomb school. Almost every country in Latin America, such conservative Middle Eastern states as Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and a number of Asian nations are on the list.

Prominent entries include Chile (5), Brazil (6) Guatemala (18), the Dominican Republic (4), Bolivia (3), Uruguay (16), Thailand (10), the Philippines (5), Korea (3) and Iran (2). All have pro-American governments in which the police are actively involved in suppressing political opposition movements. [ed. note: Apparently the five trainees from Chile were enrolled prior to the fall of the Allende government Sept. 11.]

These Third World policemen (particularly in Latin America) are themselves engaged in terrorist activities. Some of them are utilizing their US-supplied training in vigilante assassination teams like La Mano Blanca (White Hand) and Ojo por Ojo (Eye for an Eye) in Guatemala, La Banda and the "Death Squads" of Brazil and Uruguay.

It is generally known that these secretive death squads are made up of "off-duty" policemen and representatives of the civil and military intelligence services. ("The members of the Death Squad are policemen," a top Brazilian judge affirmed in 1970, "and everyone knows it.") These groups engage in kidnapping, torture, assassination and bombings. Their victims range from petty criminals to students, academicians and political activists.

Week after week Latin American papers announce the discovery of yet another body. Some estimates of the number of opposition figures executed by the death squads in Brazil alone exceed 1500. Frequently the mutilated bodies of these victims are found with cards boasting of the work of the death squad.

The countries with the most active para-police assassination squads—Brazil, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay—are also the recipients of the largest US police training grants in the region.

US involvement in the organization, training and equipping of Uruguay's Death Squad, for instance, has been abundantly described in the testimony of Nelson Bardsio. A police photographer and Death Squad member, Bardsio was kidnaped and interrogated by Tupamaro guerrillas in 1972. In his testimony (recorded in the presence of the President of Uruguay's Chamber of Deputies) Bardsio affirmed that the Department of Information and Intelligence (a government agency which provided an official "cover" for the Death Squad) was set up with the advice and financial assistance of USAID Public Safety adviser William Cantrell.

Bardsio also testifies that Cantrell made daily trips between the DII, Montevideo police headquarters and the US Embassy to ensure the steady transfer of intelligence data and coordination of all extralegal activities.

In his testimony, which served as the basis for several scenes in *State of Siege*, Bardsio named numerous police officers and military officials (many with ties to the US Embassy or the Public Safety Program) who participated in specific assassinations and bombings as members of the Death Squad. He also reported that the

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